

POPULATION EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: PURPOSE, CONTENT AND PROBLEMS

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Abstract

This paper, which is part of the effort to increase awareness and understanding of population education started by defining population education. It also looks at the purpose and content of population education before some copious recommendations were made. The paper discussed the problems and prospects of population education in Nigeria.

Introduction

Population education is an educational process which provides for a study of the population situation in the family, the community, the nation and the world with the purpose of developing in the citizens a rational and responsible attitude and behaviour towards improving the quality of life now and in the future. Population education is therefore, involving citizens both in school and out of school using multi-sectorial and intra-sectorial approaches to mobilizing the populace into understanding the inter-relationship between population change as it affects the quality of life of the people at all levels. It is a deliberate effort being made by the school to educate and inform individuals on the facts and implication of population growth with a view to developing basic understanding and appreciation of the consequences of individual decisions and behaviour regarding population matters.

The Purpose of Population Education

The purpose of population is to produce a change in attitude and values; it help people behave more responsibly and rationally; to assist individuals and communities to make better informed decisions, and ultimately, to achieve improved quality of life for all through better management of national resources and population related problems. In a publication by UNESCO titled population Education: A Contemporary Concern (UNESCO, 1978:36), some major general goals of population education were identified. In summary, these are provided in any given programme plan of activities to enable learners to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, morals and values that will enable them to:

- 1) Understand and evaluate the prevailing population situation in their community and country;
- 2) Explore and appreciate the dynamic forces that have helped to create the present population situation and the likely future consequences of the trends;
- 3) Make conscious and informed decisions based on their understanding and evaluation of the population situation;
- 4) Become aware of the relationship between the population issues and problems and the socio economic development of their communities and nation;
- 5) Respond in a rational and responsible manner to population related issues and problems.

There are many aims and specific objectives for teaching and learning population education but all derive from the above concept and goals.

The Content of Population Education

Contemporary interest in population education derives from the concern of government to improve the standard and quality of living of their citizens. Therefore, the content of population education programme tends to be wide and comprehensive. Its subject matter is purposeful living and national development. It is an inter-disciplinary educational programme drawing materials from a wide range of subjects.

The inter-disciplinary nature of population education has made scholars in the field to resist the temptation of projecting and presenting it as a "subject" this is why they prefer to refer to it as "programme" of education which used the thematic approach to process knowledge, skills, attitude and values it want students to acquire. It is a dynamic and practical programme and the most popular strategy is to locate and integrate identified themes and sub-themes in specific additional subjects in the existing school curriculum. These selected subjects are referred to as "carrier subjects" because they serve as vehicle for the transmission of

population education concepts and messages.

In the view of Yisa (1985:13), population education is problems centered and value laden. The teacher must involve the students in problems solving and decision making exercises. This can only come about when the learners are actively engaged in discovery and inquiry processes and values clarification situations. The subject matter of population education centers around events, situations and trends that affects the lives of individuals, their families, communities and nations today and in the future. The theme therefore, focuses on quality of life. In Nigeria, the teaching of population education is based on eighteen (18) themes developed by the national population education committee under the programme direction and management of the Nigerian Education Research Development Council (NERDC) of the federal ministry of education.

According to Ikegulu (1999:102), eighteen culturally relevant themes from which curriculum content for primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education were developed and were identified as follows:

- 1) Nigerian people and population issues;
- 2) Human Reproduction;
- 3) Population and Family life;
- 4) Population and urbanization;
- 5) Population and Socio-Cultural life;
- 6) Population and Economic consequences;
- 7) Population and Education;
- 8) Population and Labour force;
- 9) Population and Environmental quality
- 10) Population, Health and Nutrition;
- 11) Population and infrastructural services;
- 12) Population in History (National and international);
- 13) Population Policies and Politics (National and International);
- 14) Demographic Aspects of Population;
- 15) Population Data: Importance of Census, Sample Survey and Vital Registration System;
- 16) Population and Rural Development;
- 17) Population and Aids; and
- 18) Population, Woman and Development.

Generally, the key population related issue or core messages that are constantly addresses through researches, curriculum/instructional materials developments, population awareness and teacher training all geared towards the enhancement of the quality of life of the citizenry and they include:

- ❖ Family size and family welfare;
- ❖ Delayed marriage;

- ❖ Responsible parenthood;
- ❖ **Population change and resource development;**
- ❖ Population issues;
- ❖ Sexually transmitted diseases/AIDS and
- ❖ Primary Health care concepts.

Problems of Population Education

As a result of the newness of population education in the nation's educational curriculum, population education is bedeviled by many problems, which include the following:

Problem of Manpower

There would be problem of getting teachers with the right knowledge, training and orientation in population education. There is no doubt that this would be a problem judging from the fact that most of the present teachers did not receive the appropriate training in population education. They would be expected to be conversant with the new methods, creative in the use of them and effective. Sadly enough, many teachers never had it as part of their preparation for teaching. This is more disturbing especially against the background of fall in standard of teacher quality in Nigeria.

Problem of Participation

The problem facing population educators is how to involve people living in an area of great complexity in a learning process in a way that is personally meaningful and intellectually honest. The goal of population education is to assist the learner in making more informed population related decision and in acting on these decisions in a way that enhances the quality of his life and his communities, now and in the future.

Resource Problem

There is the problem of inadequate instructional materials and audio-visual aids for training of teachers and students. Also, there is the problem of irregular monitoring visits to pilot schools due to lack of vehicles for government functionaries.

Problem of Misconception

Lack of interest in the programme on the part of teachers and students because of the fact that population education is not examinable at the school certificate level.

There is also the poor perception by scholars in other disciplines that population education is superficial and inadequate in intellectual dept of any particular discipline; which is traceable to the multi-disciplinary nature.

Problem of Growth in Student's Population

Every year schools continue to show increase in student's population. This has an adverse implication for the teaching and learning of population education.

Prospects of Population Education

Population education as an element of both population policy and educational policy can make a significant contributions to development. This statement is buttressed not only by an increase in the economic well being of a nation but also by the increasing capacity of the individual to guide and influence the direction of their own lives. If the concept of development has been so defined to include the capacity of individuals to guide and determine the direction of their own lives, population education s therefore a prerequisite to achieving this objective.

It is believed that greater understanding of the nature of population changes and the consequences of these changes can assist both individuals and nations to better regulate their population situation to meet personal and social goals. Population issues according to Udo and Viederman (1979) are the sole or primary impediments to an improved quality of life. In their own words, "an understanding of these issues is a necessary prerequisite to intelligent planning whether the issue is to the development of social services at the national level or the allocation of land at the family level.

Population educations can contribute to the solution of population problems no matter how defined at both national and individual levels by increasing awareness and understanding of the factors that contribute to population change and its consequences. In many countries, population education developed as a response to a concern for rapid population growth. It is often assumed that its relevance is limited to countries where rapid population growth is a problem. This need not be the case. Population education is not or need not be a prescriptive programme dealing with only certain type of population situation.

Population education is also relevant to countries wishing to increase their population, change their rates of growth in other direction to stabilize or to change their present pattern of population distribution.

Recommendations

1. In the teaching of population education, infusion approach should be adopted as this will not require the hiring of new set of teachers and examiners. In this approach, a series of related topics on population education are prepared as separate units to be added to the existing units in the course of syllabus of the subjects selected as carrier of population education.
2. Regular seminars and workshops should be organized where teachers could be exposed to the most effective methods for teaching population education.
3. Government as a matter of urgency should encourage scholars in tertiary institutions to write relevant textbooks that young teachers can easily fall on when they are employed.

Conclusion

The need for population education in school curriculum is imperative especially now when the nations population growth is rising at an alarming rate. This follows that if Nigeria is serious about her growing population, she should take valid population decisions, which would lead to the development of educational programme for children and youths whose reproductive years are still ahead of them.

References

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